Director's Meeting with the Bay-Delta Sport Fishing Enhancement Stamp (BDSFES) and Striped Bass Stamp Fund (SBSF) Advisory Committees

May 30, 2007 9:00-12:00

Director's Conference Room, 12th Floor 1416 Ninth Street Sacramento, CA 95814

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees:

DFG Representatives

Greg Hurner, Assistant to the Director
Sonke Mastrup, Deputy Director
Neil Manji, Fisheries Branch Chief
Terry Foreman, Fisheries Program Manager
Marty Gingras, Striped Bass Stamp Fund Program Manager
Heather McIntire, BDSFES Environmental Scientist
Karen Mitchell, BDSFES Environmental Scientist

Committee Members

John Beuttler, BDSFES & SBSF committees
Jim Crenshaw, BDSFES & SBSF committee chairman
Jim Edgar, BDSFES committee
Phil Havlicek, BDSFES committee
Ken Jones, BDSFES committee
John Ryzanych, BDSFES committee
Bob Strickland, BDSFES & SBSF committees
Jack Findleton, SBSF committee
Richard Izmirian, SBSF committee
Mike McKenzie, SBSF committee
Larry Stenger, SBSF committee

Public

Dan Bacher
John Banks
Jackson Chapman
Doug Lovell
Whitey Rassmussen

Introductions

Introductions were made around the room.

Introductory Remarks

The two committees requested this meeting with the Director to discuss striped bass issues and policy.

Messers Manji and Mastrup made introductory remarks. The Director was ill and unable to attend.

Mr. Manji thanked the members of the committees and the public for coming to this meeting, and stated that the Department appreciates everyone's time and commitment to striped bass issues. We hope to leave this meeting with a better understanding of what needs to be accomplished.

SBSF Fund Condition, Current and Projected Expenditures (Marty Gingras) The SBSF currently has approximately \$2.7 million in the account. Staff are currently developing an updated budget to be presented at the next SBSF meeting. The SBSF has \$771,000 in annual spending authority which has hampered efforts to spend down the account.

Mr. Stenger requested a detailed budget at the next SBSF meeting. A detailed budget should be available within two weeks.

Mr. Strickland asked about what happened to the fund between 2004 and 2007. Were there expenditures from the fund?

Mr. Gingras said that funds were spent on mitigation, equipment, and overtime for wardens.

• **ACTION ITEM**: Obtain an updated accounting of Striped Bass Stamp fund expenditures from 2004 to 2007.

Mr. Gingras stated that in early February 2004, a subcommittee of the SBSF met to identify and prioritize projects and project categories, other than stocking, appropriate for SBSF expenditures. The discussion took into account factors such as, the pending decision to expand SWP pumping capability to 8,500 cfs, proposals to adopt a slot-limit for striped bass, consideration of new SWP/CVP fish screens, and termination of the striped bass management program's conservation plan at the end of 2004. The full committee evaluated the subcommittee's recommendations and voted to "accept the concept" of the following projects:

 Striped Bass Fishery Economic Value Update – A valuation update should be useful during this period of intense decision-making and it could provide a means of restating DFG's general public trust interests (in addition to ESA) in protecting the striped bass fishery. About one and a half years ago, the Department began working with California State University (CSU) Chico to develop a proposal. The CSU Chico proposal is detailed and this project could provide valuable information on the economic value of the striped bass fishery. Current projects costs are higher than those estimated by the subcommittee. The Committee originally accepted this proposal with an estimated cost of \$100,000; the actual budget came in at \$400,000 one and a half years ago. It is likely that the current cost is somewhat higher now.

This may be a project where the two committee's could cost-share on a project.

Mr. Mastrup suggested that the committee first obtain a new scope-ofwork, see what CSU Chico proposes to accomplish, and once that is done, decide whether or not to go ahead with this project.

Mr. McKenzie stated that the planning needs to continue so that we can move forward on this project.

Mr. Beuttler stated that he is part of the Delta Vision Process and this group does not know that sport fisheries have economic value and that this project is necessary so that we can bring the economic value of sport fish to the table during discussions and negotiations. This information is necessary to participate in these conversations.

 Population Modeling – This project would determine the valuation of water project proposals (e.g., 8,500 cfs expansion) and create an up-todate striped bass population model which would facilitate population enhancement options (e.g., screening facilities, fishing regulation changes), including an evaluation of the late 1990's adult "recovery."

(There are many aspects of this project that are being pursued through the Interagency Ecological Program (IEP) and the Pelagic Organism Decline (POD) group. This has not been pursued.)

• Miscellaneous Analysis – There are many "project impact" and population dynamics questions pending at this time that require substantial data analysis and reporting to address. Examples include assessing the role of density dependence, updating our understanding of direct loss effects on the population, estimating the effects of the SWP 8,500 cfs expansion, estimating the effects of EWA implementation, and refining/developing 2000 – 2004 population estimates.

(This has not been pursued.)

Assessment of Egg Viability in Older Striped Bass – It is hypothesized
that the eggs from older females may have impaired viability due to
contaminant burdens or related poor health. This effort could begin with a
review of the literature and, if appropriate, a reconnaissance level
assessment.

Through literature review and discussions with a researcher at UC Davis, this work has been done and preliminary results indicate that toxins present in the water impact egg and larval survival. The SBSF Advisory Committee will not further pursue this option.

 Salvage Acclimation Assessment – It is hypothesized that post-release survival of fish (including striped bass) salvaged at export facilities would improve if they were held in net pens for a short period (e.g., 24 hours). This would require significant coordination with the interagency Collection, Handling, Trucking, and Release program.

Proposed years ago, the Salvage Acclimation Assessment proposal is a contentious one. Salvage improvements are the focus of a multi-agency task force. This proposal has significant ESA concerns and must be integrated into the existing task force program. Salvage acclimation is one small part of this salvage program. The current salvage project has ESA permits. Under this project, we would be proposing to change the current procedure. Therefore, a new ESA permit would be required for this program. (This has not been pursued.)

Mr. Stenger stated that this project was brought up four years ago and that it benefits all the species released into the net pens.

Mr. Mastrup stated that the Department abides by federal law, and must have the proper ESA permits before such a project can be implemented.

 ACTION ITEM: At the next SBSF meeting have a full discussion of this proposal.

Mr. Adams asked whether there are funds that should be put back into the SBSF account, and that his group has 16,000 striped bass angler signatures that support a striped bass fishery in the delta. The population is in decline and striped bass should not be the scapegoat for the decline of other species.

ACTION ITEM: The Department will prepare a Fisheries
 Management Plan for striped bass. It will include information from
 the old Fisheries Management Plan, public input, the Conservation
 Plan, and incorporate new information and current environmental
 issues.

 ACTION ITEM: The Department will provide the SBSF Advisory Committee a detailed budget that includes additional funding sources. In other detailed budgets, the mitigation income from PG&E (Mirant) and the Four-Pumps Agreement were included in the budget. It is necessary to determine what other sources of funding are coming into the account.

BDSFES Fund Condition, Current and Projected Expenditures (Terry Foreman)

The BDSFES legislation was enacted in October 2003. The legislation states that all anglers fishing within the geographic range must purchase a stamp and that those funds will go into a dedicated account. Legislation also requires a Director-appointed advisory committee to recommend project expenditures. Funds from this account are used for

"...the long-term, sustainable benefit of the primary bay-delta sport fisheries, including, but not limited to, striped bass, sturgeon, black bass, halibut, salmon, surf perch, steelhead trout, and American shad."
"...Funds shall be expended to benefit sport fish populations, sport fishing opportunities, and anglers within the geographic parameters ... and consistent with state and federal Endangered Species Act requirements and applicable commission policies."

To date, the BDSFES stamp has generated \$5.8 million dollars in stamp revenue including interest. The Department cannot spend any money without *spending authority* from the Department of Finance. We received spending authority on July 1, 2006.

Just over \$500,000 has been spent on projects or is pending.

Prior to July 1, 2006, BDSFES had a small amount of borrowed spending authority.

 Striped Bass Fishing Map Reprint 	\$ 9,900
 Warden Overtime for Combatting Sturgeon Poaching 	\$ 50,000
Projects Funded since July 1, 2006	¢400,000
Central Valley Angler Survey	\$198,000
 Turtle Bay Boating & Fishing Access Facility 	\$ 50,000
 Aquarium in the Classroom Program 	\$ 10,000
Sturgeon Punch Card	\$ 35,000
 Salmon Acclimation 	\$ 50,000
Projects Authorized – contracts pending	
 Black Bass Tournament Release Boat 	\$ 50,000
 Knights Landing River Access & Boat Launch Facility 	\$ 33,500

Currently, DFG staff are reviewing proposals from a Proposal Solicitation Notice. This process provided DFG with a variety of project types which will go through a three-tiered review process: initial review, technical review, advisory committee review. We anticipate the Committee review and recommendations to the Director to happen by the end of summer.

Mr. Crenshaw asked whether or not we were still receiving other funding that was going into the SBSF account (i.e., mitigation money from DWR, Mirant, etc.).

Mr. Beuttler stated that the Four Pumps mitigation money was reimbursement for pen rearing and is now used for the Delta-Bay Enhanced Enforcement Project (DBEEP).

 ACTION ITEM: Determine where that money is now going and why not to the SBSF.

Striped Bass Presentation (Mr. Gingras)

We have several long-term databases that follow striped bass trends. The Tow Net Survey produces an index of juvenile striped bass abundance. The actual level of the index is very low, so low that its value as a useful index is reduced.

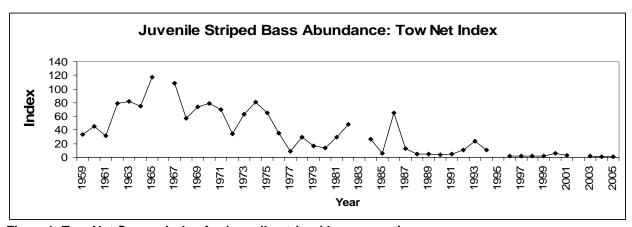


Figure 1. Tow Net Survey index for juvenile striped bass over time.

The Department also follows striped bass abundance through the adult striped bass tagging program. This program relies on the number of fish tagged and the number of tag recoveries to produce an estimate of striped bass abundance. The most recent estimate (2004) is 1.2 million adults. This number is not final; additional tag returns over time will refine the estimate and will improve the confidence interval around the estimate.

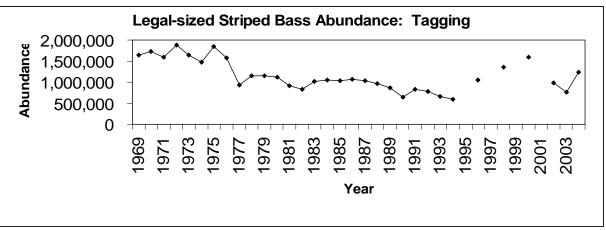


Figure 2. Striped bass abundance estimate based on tagging.

Mr. Strickland asked whether or not an estimate exists of striped bass abundance based on direct losses at the pumps or from losses with the trucking and dumping of salvaged fish.

Mr. Beuttler (?) stated that salvage is tracked and used through the Four-Pumps Agreement to mitigate for those direct losses.

Mr. Gingras noted that the Department also uses the commercial/recreational log books to evaluate Catch Per Unit Effort (i.e., catch per angler hour). These numbers are biased high because we do not include log book information from trips where no fish were caught. This represents the number of fish kept per 100 hours of fishing.

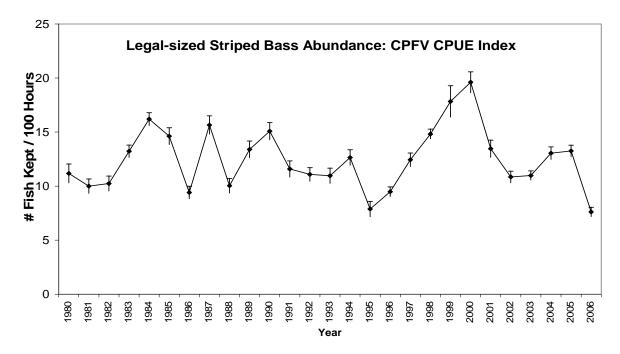


Figure 3. Striped Bass catch per unit effort based on commercial/recreational fishing boat logs.

Using 2000-2005 data, the Department estimates that anglers take approximately 10% to 20% of the population annually. Striped bass survival rates estimates vary from 16% to 100%.

Mr. Mastrup noted that we need to understand how and why striped bass are dying before we can consider adding any more to the system.

Policy Review (Neil Manji)

The Fish and Game Commission established the striped bass policy in 1996. It recognized the striped bass population was in decline, and set a specific short-term goal of 1.1 millions adults and a long-term goal of 3.0 million adults and states that our actions must be consistent with DFG's public trust responsibilities - including endangered and threatened species and species of special concern. DFG met the interim goal of 1.1 million adult striped bass, but has not met the long-term goal. This policy was based on the 1989 Striped Bass Management Plan.

Many environmental changes have occurred since the striped bass policy was developed and the current policy is no longer appropriate for today's environmental challenges. Many pelagic species such as striped bass, delta smelt and threadfin shad have experienced declines in abundance over the last

few years. The Pelagic Organism Decline (POD) is under evaluation and may have several contributing factors, including changes in water flow, introduced species, changes in the food web, and toxins in the environment.

Under these conditions, the Department does not support stocking striped bass in the Delta.

To address these serious concerns, the Department plans to do the following:

- Continue POD evaluation and address issues which improve the system for all fish including striped bass;
- Prepare a Striped Bass Management Plan; and
- Update the striped bass policy so that it is consistent with current issues.

Mr. McKenzie stated that DFG has rolled over to USBR and DWR for years and that is not your public trust responsibilities. Complete ecosystem restoration is the key for this whole thing. Politics are making the decisions - not sound science. We need more natural flow of water through the Delta. The Department needs to stand up to water diverters.

Mr. Beuttler stated that we live with the constraints that the fishery is going to be managed based on listed species. You have to balance how you manage striped bass with what you do for listed species. We need to start with the Fisheries Management Plan. It needs to include Commission Policy, performance objectives and then you need to use the plan - don't just write it and put it away! We don't want to lower our expectations because of the current environmental situation.

Mr. Mastrup replied that we (DFG) manage(s) our resources by the law and we've lost a lot. What can we hang on to? We have few levers at our disposal. We need to address what is within our sphere of influence.

Mr. Havlicek said that the advisory committees do not address water policy.

Mr. Edgar stated that we operate on two planes: (1) pragmatic - what can we do; and (2) policy. I worry about spending lots of money on a management plan without the plan having a focus. The plan needs to identify specific projects that can be done and that are helpful. The plan itself will not fix the problem.

Mr. Mastrup said a management plan can create pathways, they can link issues with the biology and options. It documents what you've decided can and should be done. It may take about two years to complete. The process will include stakeholder input.

Committee Role

Mr. Hurner said he spoke with the Director today, he is sick and he apologizes for not making this meeting. The Director has been with the Department for many years and is now having to deal with decisions, good and bad, that were made many years ago. We need to develop a meaningful striped bass management plan that incorporates ecosystem-wide issues as well as challenges facing striped bass. The Fisheries Management Plan needs to be developed in the context of what is going on now.

Outreach is also very important to the Director. The restructuring that occurred will improve communication and aid in our ability to better address emerging issues. For example, the staff working on water issues was placed into one branch - the Water Branch. This will help the Department better address water issues. The Department is trying to be more engaged in water issues.

The role of your committee in this is to recommend projects for the expenditures of stamp funds. We want to hear from you. We want your advice.

Mr. Bartley felt that we (SBS) need more regular meetings. We need to meet four times a year not once in three years. We also need more spending authority.

Mr. Crenshaw asked what we can do right now to increase the population of striped bass.

Mr. Mastrup replied that we have to figure out what's going on in the Delta with the POD. What we can do is get organized and better schedule meetings. We have good projects and there are things we can do.

Mr. Lovell stated that what he heard Greg (Hurner) say is that the Department will be engaged in striped bass, the Department is committed to doing what it can, and the Department is going to err on the side of listed species.

Mr. Hurner replied that he was talking about being engaged with the whole Delta, not just striped bass.

Mr. Beuttler stated that the Department needs to get the Environmental Water Account fully funded so that is can be used as it was envisioned. It would provide more water which would benefit delta smelt and what benefits delta smelt will benefit striped bass. The Department needs to be committed to finding long-term solutions.

Mr. Edgar stated that the Department also needs to develop a good Public Relations campaign. Anglers need to understand the seriousness of the situation. Anglers need to know why they should care about the issues.

 ACTION ITEM: Invite Assistant Deputy Director Bernadette Fees to the next joint meeting to talk about how to inform the public about the condition of the Delta.

Public Comment Period

Mr. Adams noted that we need individuals who live and work in the Delta to be committed to Delta health.

At this point it was noticed by Mr. Mastrup that Mr. Jackson Chapman was tape recording this meeting without announcing that he was doing so. When asked if he was recording the meeting, Mr. Chapman said that he thought it was obvious and that he did not need to tell anyone.

Mr. Lovell - I think the primary focus is the need for DFG to be engaged in striped bass issues. The problem will not go away. A slot limit could help ensure the longevity of the fishery and would minimize mitigation issues. The two committees need to find a plan and stay on top of the timeliness of the plan. There needs to be a scientific study of striped bass predation.

Mr. Havlicek noted that a survey was conducted on the Coastside website, and 85% were in favor of a slot limit.

Mr. Mastrup stated that regulations are a burden to anglers, and the Department needs to have assurance of its outcome.

Mr. Mastrup noted that the DFG needs to balance conflicting values every day, and that an effective management plan will balance these things. We need to have a better understanding on what is going on with POD and determine the most effective management actions.

Mr. John Banks felt that the Department should improve public outreach and should look into the Delta Information Center at the intersection of Hwy 160 and Hwy12.

Mr. Crenshaw felt we need to ensure that we are not documenting the demise of the fishery.

Messers Manji and Mastrup thanked the committees and the public for coming to this meeting and providing a valuable discussion on striped bass.